

CHURCH NEWS

FROM THE NORTHERN COUNTRIES

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"Skandinavien-Heim" in Vienna Closes Down.

Having served for two years and a half as a home for Hungarian refugees in Vienna the "Skandinavien-Heim" belonging to the Northern Lutheran Churches closed down last month. The building was bought during the winter 1956-1957 by the relief organizations of the Northern Churches and was turned into a transit camp for refugees who were to emigrate or be integrated into Austria. The home has accommodated altogether 456 Hungarian refugees during a total number of 57,000 days of catering. The special task of the "Skandinavian-Heim" has now to a large extent been solved and the organizations have put the property up for sale. The money thus obtained will be used for paying for old and sick people among the refugees who cannot be helped in any other way in institutions belonging to the Austrian Evangelical Church. It is also planned to use some of the money for the Hungarian refugee congregation in Vienna.

Various people from the Northern countries have been in charge of the "Skandinavien-Heim", the last one being School Inspector Johannes Rasmussen from Denmark, assisted by Danish, Norwegian, Finnish and Swedish deaconesses.

German-Scandinavian Church Convention in Jarvenpää.

At the end of September the German-Scandinavian Church Convention met for a conference about "Youth and the Church" at the Finnish Laymen's Institute at Jarvenpää. The conference was attended by 50-60 people, 15 of whom came from East Germany. Lectures on "Main Tendencies Among Young People in Relation to the Church" and "The Youth and the Congregation" were followed by discussions, and short reports were given from the different countries on the relations between youth and the Church. This being the 10th anniversary of the Convention, the President, the Norwegian minister to the deaf-and-dumb, Dr. C. Bonnevie-Svendsen, gave a short address in which he expressed his appreciation of the many successful conferences, and Bishop Krummacher of Greifswald thanked the Northern members for their initiative in starting the Convention and for the valuable contact thus established between the German Churches and the Churches of the Northern countries.

Christian Educators from the Northern Countries Assembled in Oslo.

At the end of September 4-5 Christian educators from each of the Northern countries were assembled in Oslo in order to discuss common problems and to benefit in their future work from experiences made in the other countries. The conference was led by the head of the Norwegian Pedagogical Institute, Mr. Bjarne Hareide, and besides reports from the various countries such subjects as catechumenicity, developments in humanistic pedagogy, religious instruction in schools, and teaching aids were discussed.

New President of the Board of the Northern Ecumenical Institute.

At its meeting in Oslo at the beginning of October the Board of the Northern Ecumenical Institute elected Professor Aimo T. Niko-lainen, Finland, new President instead of Bishop 'Asmundur Gudmundsson Iceland. Rev. G. Sparring-Petersen, Rural Dean, Denmark, was elected chairman of the Executive Committee.

The Board resolved to arrange a Northern ecumenical rally at Nyborg Strand, Denmark, at which the problems of home and family will be discussed. The rally will probably take place in the summer of 1961. Another Northern conference on the responsibility of Christians in modern democracy is also being planned.

DENMARK

Proposal for Danish Free Church Union.

A proposal for a union of the Danish Free Churches under the name of "The Danish Confessional Church" which was introduced at the recent Evangelical Free Church Council meeting by the young Methodist minister, Rev. Poul-Erik Bjerno, will now be discussed in a larger assembly at the Free Church preachers' meeting at Kolding next year.

The proposed union should include the Baptist Church, the Methodist Church, the Mission Covenant Church, the Evangelical-Lutheran Free Church, and the Apostolic Church (the Pentecostal Movement), but should be open to all who could agree to its constitution. The communities mentioned above number 15,000 grown-up members.

There is no thought of a uniform church in the proposal, but of a union in which the communities might have a "possibility of growing together under the guidance of the Holy Ghost". The common dogmatic basis would be the belief in the Trinity, in Jesus Christ as the Redeemer of the world by Whom men are saved by grace and faith, in Holy Scripture as the inspiring word of God, and in the Apostolic and the Nicene Creeds.

The individual denominations should continue with their accustomed order of service, but in time a common service-book and prayer-book should be adopted. Both infant and adult baptism should be practised side by side in the union. There should be bishops, clergymen and "deacons" and the supreme authority should be a synod, elected by the congregations through diocesan councils. The synod, made up by an equal number of clergy and laymen, should elect the bishops.

So far the Free Church communities in question have made no official commentaries to the proposal, but it may be expected to be carefully considered and discussed.

Warm Tribute to Albert Schweitzer.

An overwhelming and warmhearted tribute was paid to the famous scholar of theology and medical missionary in Lambarene, Professor Albert Schweitzer, when presented with the Sonning Prize of 100,000 Danish Crowns on September 29th, at a ceremony in the aula of the University of Copenhagen. Prominent representatives of State, Church, science and cultural life were present at the occasion at which Professor of Theology, Søren Holm, praised him for his work in the service of charity and truth.

In the evening the Prime Minister, Mr. H.C. Hansen, was host at a gala dinner in the Parliamentary building, Christiansborg Castle, at which Albert Schweitzer was given another 50,000 Danish Crowns which was part of money collected in taxes by the State from the showing of the film about the life of Albert Schweitzer.

The Press, radio and television also joined in honouring the 84-years old pioneer.

Who May Teach Religion in Schools.

An elementary school teacher, declaring himself to be an atheistic humanist, has complained to the "ombudsmanden" (official delegate and legal expert) appointed by Parliament about the discrimination in schools of teachers not belonging to the Lutheran National Church. In his opinion it is against the law for the Ministry of Education to request of such a teacher that he does not attempt to influence children and young people either in or outside school hours, and that special dispensation is required for a teacher who resigns from the Lutheran National Church to retain his post. He feels, moreover, that such a teacher should be allowed to teach religion in secondary schools where the instruction includes not only Christianity but also knowledge of other religions.

The complaint has caused considerable attention and almost everybody, the "Kristeligt Dagblad" in Copenhagen included, agrees that any teacher should, of course, be free to propagate his convictions outside school hours and should also be allowed to teach any other subject but religion which, according to the Education Act, must be in conformity with the teachings of the Lutheran National Church, but from which parents may have their children exempted if they wish. Although the "Kristeligt Dagblad" does not feel that the Act justifies preventing a teacher not belonging to the National Church from teaching religion in secondary schools, it does feel it to be unreasonable, however, to entrust the subject to a teacher with an avowedly negative attitude to the confession and teachings of the Lutheran National Church.

At a recent meeting the Minister of Education, Mr. Jørgen Jørgensen, said that "as long as it is optional for a teacher to teach religion and up to the parents themselves whether their children are to take part in this instruction the teaching of religion should be of a positive Christian character". The organ of the Teachers' Association of Denmark agrees in this view.

The "Baptisternes Ugeblad" describes the privileges of the Lutheran National Church as "a relic of the days of despotism" but thinks it obvious, nevertheless, that an atheistic teacher should not teach religion; on the other hand members of the Free Churches ought to be entitled to do so.

Evangelical-Pedagogical Co-Ordination Council Established.

At a joint committee meeting last month the "Dansk Bibelskole", the Association of Teachers of Religion, and the Christian Teachers' Association agreed to set up an "Evangelical-Pedagogical Co-Ordination Council". Other Christian organizations, such as among others, the Y.M.C.A., the Y.W.C.A., and the "Frivilligt Drengesforbund" (Boys' Brigade), have been approached with a view to co-operation. Mr. Børge Larsen, Senior Master, was elected President.

The purpose of the Co-Ordination Council is to create a common forum in striving for a better and more efficient Christian contribution in matters of pedagogy. A similar co-ordination is to be found in the other Northern countries.

Architects and Theologians Join in Valuable Co-Operation.

The present unofficial and rather accidental co-operation between theologians and architects in Denmark has now taken more definite form and has obtained official recognition by as well as financial support from the Ministry of Church Affairs. The group comprises altogether 20 theologians, architects and other experts, among them representatives of the National Museum and the Academy of Arts. At a recent meeting Rev. J. Exner, Rural Dean, was elected chairman.

The subject of "Theology and Church Building" was discussed at the meeting, and a number of committees were set up to study various topical matters during the next six months, such as for instance "Theology and Church Architecture", "The Special Character of Old Danish Churches", "The New Churches and Tradition", "The Decoration of Churches", and "Institutional Churches". The findings of the committees will be presented to the full group at a meeting next spring.

FINLAND

Finnish Clergymen Working in Factories.

At the moment a group of 11 young Finnish clergymen are taking part in a three months' "industrial seminar", the purpose of which is to present the problems of industrialization to Church ministers and thus establish a better understanding between the Church and the workers.

The industrial seminar, arranged by the Central Board of Congregational Work, began with a four weeks' course at the Laymen's Institute at Järvenpää at which sociologists, psychologists, theologians and trade union members introduce the clergymen to the problems of the modern industrial world. After that the clergymen will go to work in factories - as far as possible in their own parishes - for six weeks and finally meet again at Järvenpää in order to compare notes and discuss their experiences.

Both trade union men and industrial leaders have been very sympathetic to the idea of clergymen working in the factories and much of the distrust of the Church and its ministers among the workers has disappeared. The clergymen intend to make use of their experiences in their later work in order to break down the barrier often existing between the Church and the workers. The plan is to start study groups in the congregations on the problems of industry, and to invite workers and employers for week-end conferences. But their main purpose is to become better equipped to preach the Gospel in such a way that it becomes a real concern of modern people and may be grasped by them.

A similar seminar was conducted last year for 10 clergymen who later on published their experiences in a small book in Finnish and English. It caused so much interest that it had to be printed in 4,000 copies.

Miss Castrén For Africa.

Miss Inga-Brita Castrén, M.A., who is well-known from her work among young people in the ecumenical movement and who has been active for several years in the Finnish Student Christian Movement and at the Finnish Laymen's Institute of the Lutheran National Church, left for Africa recently where she, during the winter, is to plan and organize a large training conference for Christian student leaders. Miss Castrén will remain in East and South Africa for two years, working in the local student organizations.

Centenary of Mission Activities.

As it will be 100 years in November since the Evangelical Movement, a revivalist movement in the Finnish Lutheran National Church, took up mission work in Japan, Rev. Toivo Rapeli, leader of the Movement, has left for Japan recently. At a farewell gathering in the home of Mr. Rapeli immediately prior to his departure the Japanese Minister, Mr. S. Tsurmu, the Finnish Minister of Education, Mr. Heikki Hosia, Bishop Martti Simojoki, Helsinki (Helsingfors), and Dr. Sakai from Japan were present.

New Book by Väinö Linna Causes Heated Discussions.

The author, Mr. Väinö Linna, whose book "The Unknown Soldier" caused such animated discussions both inside and outside Finland a few years ago, has now published the first part of a new big novel entitled "Here Under the North Star", which has given rise to a not less heated discussion. The story takes place in a rural environment in the past century and it is generally agreed that the author has a wonderful gift of description. But the language of the author has caused particular criticism. "Linna has transplanted the language of an industrial worker in Tampere (Tammerfors) to-day to a country district of the past", the comments go, and some 250 swear-words and more than 60 indecent expressions have been counted in the book.

The big religious newspaper "Kotimaa" recently published an article - clearly having Linna's book in mind - under the heading "Good Taste and Vulgarity" in which it says:

"A blow has been struck against the values on which depends the inner strength of our nation. There is reason to appeal to all who publicly employ the written and spoken word as well as to all who are

responsible for their training and their assignments to realize the importance of their positions and their responsibilities and to strive after the spiritual maturity which acknowledges the demands of good taste, civilized behaviour, and, above all, shows respect for everything holy. The feeling of holiness is the deepest safeguard of man."

More Women Than Men to Study Theology.

This year for the first time more women than men have entered their names for theology. Out of 113 new students at the Theological Faculty at Helsinki (Helsingfors) 55 are men and 58 women. At the Faculty at Turku (Åbo) there are 5 men and 4 women students.

As may be remembered women may not take orders in the Lutheran National Church of Finland, but women theologians are employed in a number of spheres of the life of the Church.

Disabled Soldiers Gathered for "Spiritual Days".

For the 12th time the Fraternity of Disabled Soldiers will conduct "spiritual days" for its members at the end of this month. In the course of time these days of religious programmes have been attended by an increasing number of people - at the last gathering at Oulu (Uleåborg) some 400 men were present. This time they will be held at Björneborg (Åbo).

In various places all over the country war cripples also meet locally for religious meetings arranged in full co-operation with congregations and clergymen.

There are still some 50,000 war cripples, some 5,000 of whom are without one or more limbs, and about 10,000 suffer from the after-effects of a tuberculosis contracted in the war.

News in Brief:

- The Supreme Court of Judicature in Finland has ruled that the book "The Song of the Red Ruby" by the Norwegian author Agnar Mykle is of an indecent nature. Consequently all imports and sales of the book have been banned.
- An official statistics on the causes of death during 1951-1955 shows that four times as many men as women commit suicide.

ICELAND

New Ordination Bishop in Northern Iceland.

On the death of the Ordination Bishop, Bishop Friðrik Rafnar, the Rural Dean, Rev. Sigurður Stefánsson, Mýrsvellir, has been appointed Ordination Bishop of Northern Iceland and has been consecrated in Hólar Cathedral.

NORWAY

Should Missions in South Africa Make a Stand?

In a statement to the "Morgenposten" the head of the Missionary Institute in Oslo, Dr. O.G. Myklebust, says that the Christian missions in South Africa must say an unequivocal no to the laws and regulations of the Government even if this, as is most probable, should lead to the expulsion of missionaries and seizure of mission property. In his opinion this would carry greater conviction than to continue preaching a message which cannot be given tangible expression because of racial discrimination.

The Secretary General of the Norwegian Missionary Society, Dr. F. Birkeli, says in the "Vårt Land" that no one but the missionaries themselves, standing in the midst of a situation fraught with complicated problems, can decide about this. The Missionary Society has no doubts but that the Apartheid policy is indefensible from a Christian point of view, Dr. Birkeli stresses, and that the missions - except for the Boer Church - have taken a clear and definite stand on this point.

On the eve of his departure the South African undergraduate, Mr. Hans Beukes, who arrived last month on a scholarship for a 3-years' study at the University of Oslo, had his passport confiscated by the authorities. On his arrival in Oslo he was cheered as a victim of racial discrimination and in the evening he and the English minister, Rev. Michael Scott, addressed a meeting in the Students' Association on the fight for freedom and equality on behalf of the people of South Africa. The meeting passed a resolution requesting the Norwegian Government to raise the demand in the United Nations for a new investigation with regard to South Africa. Several religious papers and newspapers support the idea of a Norwegian move in support of the people in South Africa.

Christians Should Train for Technical Assistance.

In a leading article the Oslo Home Mission weekly "Vår Kirke" strongly advocates that Christian young people take up training for technical assistance in underdeveloped countries. The work must be organized primarily through the United Nations, the paper writes, and in this connection the task of the Churches must be to influence public opinion so that contributions to the work are increased "to such an extent that they, if possible, constitute a voluntary reduction in our own standard of living".

As a motivation for this appeal it is emphasized that the world population will be doubled in the course of the next 30 years and that the technological development in no way will be able to keep in step with the growing birth-rate surplus. If exceptional action is not taken it will mean starvation for most of the children born to-day and at the same time it will constitute a constant threat to world peace and result in grave risks of aggressions and possible migrations on a scale not yet experienced. In connection with its appeal to Christian young people to be at hand for "secular" assistance work the paper refers to a recent statement by the Secretary General of the East Asia Christian Council, Dr. D.T. Niles, who says that it is this particular Christian service in so-called non-religious jobs which will be of decisive importance to the future possibilities of the Church to bear witness to its message.

Operation "Expiation Works" in Norway.

Last month a group of 17 young Germans arrived in Norway where they will work at the extension of a home for the mentally deficient at Borkenes. Most of the Germans are skilled workers who will receive no pay for their work, which will probably take six months.

The enterprise is part of the scheme of the "Aktion Sühnezeichen" (Operation Expiation Works) to atone in some practical measure by working in formerly German-occupied countries for some of the guilt incurred by the German nation during the War.

The main force behind the scheme is President Lothar Kreyssig, Magdeburg, and the idea was that both East and West Germans should take part in it, but so far the East German volunteers have been denied exit visas, including 40 young people for the project in Norway.

A similar undertaking has been going on in Holland since April where holiday homes for workers' families from Rotterdam are being erected, and in Israel support is given to a relief action. A project is being planned for Greece next year. The Governments of Poland and Czechoslovakia have replied that it will not be possible to carry out such works in their countries.

Eight Young People Give One Year for Religious Work.

Four young men and four young women have promised to give one year for service in the work of the Norwegian Mission Covenant Church among children and young people. Last month they attended a short course at the Aasgar Bible School in Bible knowledge, youth work, technical aids, hobby courses, and such like, and are now employed by the Covenant Church in various places in the country.

Joint Conference of the Diocesan Councils Next Month.

From November 15th - 19th all the Diocesan Councils of Norway will meet in Oslo for a conference. According to the Church Organization Act such a conference must take place every fourth year, the first one having taken place in the autumn of 1955.

At the conference in November the subjects for discussion will be 1) the responsibility of the Church for school children and its work among them, voluntary services, and the instruction of candidates for confirmation, 2) the ministry of "deacons" and deaconesses, and 3) the Church and the 45-hour working week. Reports on and discussions about various kinds of work sponsored by the Diocesan Councils will also be presented.

Impending Calamitous Shortage of Clergymen.

So far there have been only 20 new divinity students this year and if the intake is not considerably increased the next few years a calamitous shortage of clergymen in the Lutheran National Church will be the result, the Christian daily paper in Oslo "Vart Land" concludes from a recent survey.

It is already difficult to find applicants for livings in Northern Norway and as substitute pastors. And the religious organizations, which until two years ago employed 226 theological graduates against only 170 at present, have several times tried in vain to find clergymen for certain positions. The extension of the schools means a greater need for divinity graduates in education, and new livings must be

established in step with the growth of population. Added to this comes the fact that no less than 600 clergymen or 60 % of the total number are due to retire on account of age during the decade from 1969 - 1978, according to the statistics.

The "Vårt Land" takes a very serious view of the situation and appeals to the Church and the congregations to turn the tide themselves by bringing home to young people the call for service and by praying to the Lord of the Church to call forth new workers.

Four Radio Programmes: "What Do People Expect of the Church?"

On the first three Thursdays in October the Norwegian radio has broadcast a series of lectures under the heading: "What do People Expect of the Church?" In these programmes a number of people have taken up for critical review the relation of the Church to science, cultural life, youth, social problems, education, and several other matters. The last programme on October 22nd has consisted of a summary of the criticisms and an answer by two representatives of the Church.

News in Brief:

- From October 1st next year the Evangelical programmes in Norwegian, called Norea Radio and up to now having been broadcast from Tanger, will come from a new 100-kilowatt short-wave station in Monte Carlo.

- Mr. Tor Ankrust, D.D., has been appointed full time staff member of the Congregational Institute in Oslo for three years in order that he may study human, ethical, and cultural problems arising from the industrialization of society.

SWEDEN

Two Women Granted the Right to Preach.

Bishop Helge Ljungberg, Stockholm, has granted two women divinity graduates the right to preach but not to administer the sacraments. They are Dr. Margit Sahlin, Head of the Sancta Katharina-stiftelsen (St. Catherine's Foundation), who last month was granted the right to conduct services in the new chapel of the Foundation as well as in other churches in the diocese wherever she might be wanted by the clergymen, and the secretary, Mrs. Barbro Nordholm-Ståhl, who has been allowed to conduct services in the congregation of Oscar where she is employed.

Up to now Dr. Sahlin, who is a member of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, has not asked to be ordained as she was afraid that the ordination of a woman might add to the discord in the Swedish Lutheran National Church and hamper its work. But in a statement over the Swedish radio on the occasion of her becoming entitled to preach in church, she said that she is once more considering applying for ordination as the unity of the Church has already been shattered in many ways. It is a question whether it is not important to the Swedish Church on the whole and to other Churches as well that an uncompromising stand should be taken at this time. Other Churches elsewhere in the world expect the Church of Sweden to take such a step which may be of guidance to them. "I feel it to be a grave responsibility", Dr. Margit Sahlin said.

After the Bishops' Conference in September where the matter of women pastors was discussed anew, Archbishop Hultgren said to the Press that so far no woman graduate had asked for ordination. Should this happen, the bishop who is asked for ordination by a woman theologian would have to decide for himself, but the bishops are agreed to consult one another before making any decisions.

Successful Conference for Trade Unions and Foreign Missions.

A number of prominent representatives of the Swedish Trade Union Movement, the Co-Operative Union, and the Swedish Missionary Societies met last month for a conference at the Trade Union School at Runö. Here the possibilities of joint efforts in the underdeveloped countries were discussed and it turned out that there was both willingness and need for practical co-operation, although the Trade Union Movement and the Co-Operative Union stressed the social and economic development and the missionary societies the preaching of the Christian message. The conference paved the way for a better understanding and a greater mutual respect in place of the previous rather usual distrust among the two parties, and it was agreed to request of the responsible leaders of the movements to set up a committee which should work for future co-ordination and co-operation.

Commenting on the event the weekly paper of the Swedish Mission Covenant Church, the "Svensk Veckotidning", expresses the wish that the conference may have introduced a new era in Swedish international co-operation by this attempt at co-operation among all "people of good will", and Mr. Albert Hammerton of the Free Trade Union International, who also took part in the conference, said that he hoped the event would become an example for other countries.

30,000 People Attend Free Church Day in Stockholm.

No less than 30,000 people were assembled last month at the Skansen, Stockholm, for the annual Free Church Day. This time the main topic was the social responsibility and work of the Free Churches, and the speaker was the President of the Christian Social Workers' Union, Mr. Daniel Wiklund, Town Council Inspector. During the lecture 500-600 children attended a Sunday school service in the Skansen-theatre, and in the Seglora Church people who might want it could go for private counselling and confession. The Day ended with a young people's night at which some 10,000 young people listened to Mr. Denis Clark from South Africa and Mr. Thomas Mushikangondo from the Belgian Congo.

29 Young People Give One Year for Religious Work.

For one year from now 14 young people between 18 and 26 years will be unpaid workers among young people and in the ordinary congregational work of the Swedish Mission Covenant Church. During the last month they have attended a short training course at the Missionsgården at Sollentuna. This is the 5th arrangement of its kind and 80 young people altogether have contributed one year's work in this way.

15 young Baptists have taken part in a similar course at the youth centre at "Grävlingsberg" and will now be employed in small groups in the work among young people of the Baptist Church. Most of the volunteers are 18-19 years old.

30 New Churches to be Built in Stockholm.

The need for new churches in the constantly expanding city of Stockholm is estimated at 30 churches, and in 20 places steps have already been taken for collecting the necessary funds for building a church. This information was given at a conference last month in Stockholm for some 50 people engaged in such work. The conference was convened by Bishop Helge Ljungberg and was the first of its kind, but the plan is to conduct such a conference every autumn.

News in Brief:

- Dr. Carl Gustav Diehl, Senior Lecturer and former missionary in India for 20 years, has been elected new Director of the Swedish Church Missionary Board in succession to the late Rev. Arvid Bäfverfeldt.
- In its report the Free Church Joint Committee has advocated an equality of status in principle between the National and the Free Churches when the church service of the defence forces is to be re-organized in the near future.
- A younger High Church clergyman, Rev. Rolf Lyshöi, Örebro, has resigned his office as a protest against the Act allowing women to take Holy Orders which was approved by the Church Assembly. Rev. R. Lyshöi says that he is convinced that this is only the first of a series of laws aiming at depriving the Church of its independence.
- Last month Bishop Helge Ljungberg dedicated a new open air church on the summer camp site of the Y.M.C.A. on the island of Kärnö outside Stockholm which has been put up by an ecumenical work camp. Representatives of various church denominations took part in the dedication ceremony.
- At the Bishops' Conference in September the Swedish bishops have decided to support the Christian radio station in Africa planned by the Lutheran World Federation and the Near East Christian Council rather than to give official support to the establishment of an Evangelical radio station in Switzerland.
- The Pope has appointed Archbishop Martin Lucas Apostolic Visitor of the Northern countries with residence in Stockholm.
- The Central Conference for Northern Europe of the Methodist Church will take place in September next year at Örebro, Sweden.
- Last month the foundation stone for a special students' church at Uppsala was laid by Archbishop Gunnar Hultgren. When the residential quarter in which the church is situated has been completed there will be accommodation for 4,000 - 5,000 undergraduates.

Civil Marriages Than Church Weddings in Greater Stockholm.

Recently published statistics for 1953 show that in the metropolitan area there were 5,107 civil marriages as against only 4,703 church weddings.

1,226 children or 7.1 % of all children born were named and registered, but not baptised, and 748 dead or 7 % of all deceased were interred without the services of a clergyman. 748 people resigned from the Lutheran National Church.

